

THE ESSENTIALS

Solutions for the Busiest Rooms in the House

Finishing touches, clockwise from top: Cubism tile, AKDO; glass pull, Restoration Hardware; glass knobs, Anthropologie; Arabesque tiles, AKDO; Amethyst Polished tile, Artistic Tile; Silestone quartz, Cosentino; faucet, Rohl Perrin & Rowe through Ferguson Bath, Kitchen & Lighting Gallery.

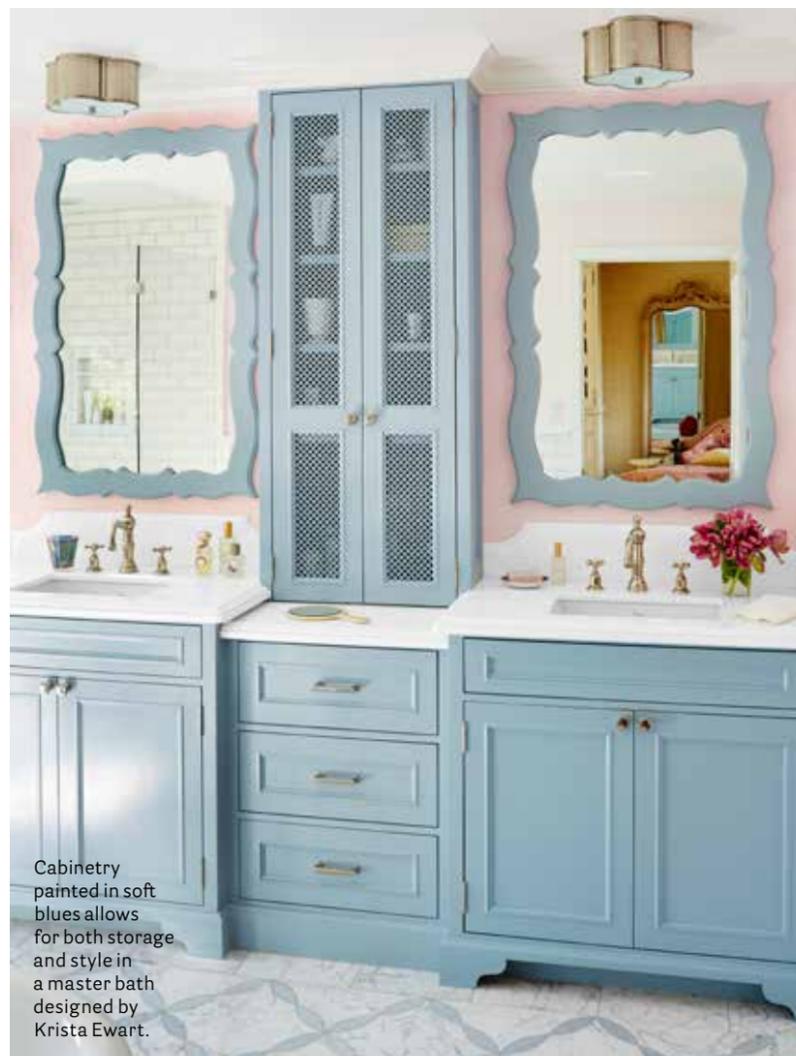
RENOVATING

JUST ADD WATER

Our primer on master-bath renovations has real talk on budgeting, who-knew insights, and a roundup of necessary luxuries. Skip to my loo!

WRITERS KATHLEEN RENDA AND HILLARY BROWN PHOTOGRAPHER STUART TYSON/STUDIO D.D. STYLIST BENJAMIN REYNAERT. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES

GETTING STARTED



Cabinetry painted in soft blues allows for both storage and style in a master bath designed by Krista Ewart.

CASH FLOW: WHAT YOU'LL SHELL OUT

It might be one of the smallest rooms in your home, but overhauling a master bathroom can put a sizable dent in your bank account. The average cost for a midrange bath remodel in 2016 was almost \$18,000, while an upscale redo clocked in at more than \$57,000. Those numbers climb fast if you opt for top-of-the-line fixtures—*

you could easily drop \$9,000 on a soaking tub or \$3,000 on a toilet—so keep these factors in mind as you budget.

IT'S WORTH IT IF YOU LOVE IT

Truth: You won't earn back the entire cost of a bathroom revamp. If you spent the upscale average of \$57,000 to redo your bathroom last year, you'd only recoup 58 percent of the investment at resale.* The upside of such a low ROI: You can go all-out with personalization rather than compromise the design in an attempt to win over

some future impossible-to-please buyer. So go ahead and say *yes!* to commissioning that luxe monogram made from mosaic tiles.

KA-CHING! BE PREPARED TO PAY FOR LABOR

The National Kitchen & Bath Association estimates that 20 percent of the total cost of a bathroom redo is labor. A lot of that has to do with the tininess of the bathroom itself—it's just physically impossible to fit the plumber, electrician, carpenter, designer, and, you know, *muralist* in the space at the same time.

MOST OF THE COSTS ARE HIDDEN

There's a lot happening in a bathroom that you don't see—and probably don't want to see. A labyrinthine network of supply pipes, drainpipes, and vent pipes runs under the floors and through the walls, parallel to the joists and sometimes sloping at a steady grade. (That would be the waste pipe from the toilet.) Move the commode to a wall where there's no access to necessary pipes, or decide you'd like the space to be one big tiled wet room with body sprayers galore, and you might be stunned by how

involved—and pricey—those alterations can be. SPENDING ON A DESIGNER CAN SAVE YOU CASH

You don't know what you don't know, so bring in someone who does. A designer who has spent decades sweating the minutiae of bathrooms can tell you that a steam shower with a ceiling taller than eight feet needs a high-powered steam generator, and marble tiles can be stained by hair dye. With that kind of specialized knowledge, you're a lot less likely to get dinged by cost overruns, big-ticket mistakes, and change orders.

PHOTOGRAPHER DOUGLAS FRIEDMAN (2)

Ready to take the plunge?

Whether it's a minor face-lift or a total revamp, transforming your master bath into a tranquil oasis is stressful. But it doesn't have to be a white-knuckle process. Here, insights, info, and ideas to inspire, plus tactics to avoid pricey mistakes. (Save your budget for the statement tub—it's worth it!)

If you're only refreshing your bathroom...

- Replacing a blah vanity or toilet can be simple and affordable, as long as you don't change its location.
- New tile can quickly perk up a tired-looking bathroom. Splurging on a few accent tiles with personality—like gold leaf—will elevate existing basic, cost-friendly tiles. Even easier: RegROUT.
- Make purchases at a home-improvement store, like Home Depot, or at a specialized kitchen-and-bath destination, where a sales rep can assist and advise you.
- Always team up with an experienced, trusted plumber and tile installer.

If you're truly renovating your bathroom...

- Today's master baths are all about replicating a lavish spa experience at home. Pampering amenities that should top your must-have list: rainfall showerheads and body jets, heated towel racks, a steam shower, and a deep soaking tub.
- Visit a high-end showroom, like Pirch or Ferguson, to evaluate styles and finishes in person.
- Just as you would hire a wedding planner, you can outsource your anxiety to a bath designer. Let him or her handle it all, from liaising with the contractor to bird-dogging the installation of a wall-mounted toilet.

GOOD TO KNOW, GOOD TO GET

AIR OUT

Adding square feet? Don't underestimate ventilation needs. A 20' x 12' room requires nearly four times the ventilation of an 8' x 5' one, especially with add-ons like jetted tubs, which release more vapor into the air. For baths such as these, invest in a powerful ventilation system, where the noisy exhaust fan is installed elsewhere (like in an attic) to preserve the room's tranquil mood.

Sizing It Up

Measure toiletries before deciding dimensions for shower shelves or niches, factoring in space for oversize bottles and once-in-a-while products like salt scrubs or hair masks. While you're at it, take

stock of your towels: If you're a fan of five-foot-long bath sheets, be sure to mount towel bars around 48 inches from the floor—still comfortable to reach, but at a height where large towels will stay high and dry.

SUPER SOAKERS

A tub is a try-before-you-buy purchase. Go on and lie down, so you'll avoid the most common complaint—that the angle of the back is too steep or uncomfortable.



Economical subway tiles on the wall and shower surround enabled Ewart's clients to splurge on a cast-iron claw-foot tub.

LEADING LIGHTS

Of all the high-impact changes you can make in a reno, good lighting is the most transformative. Lights mounted high or directly overhead are wickedly aging—they cast shadows on the lower half of your face! But fixtures on either side of the mirror, each with 75- or 100-watt bulbs, will turn back the clock, providing focused, flattering light for applying makeup or shaving. Just put them on dimmers so you're not assaulted at night.

REST ASSURED

Shower seating is a game changer. Whether it's a built-in bench, a fold-down teak seat, or a free-standing resin stool, it's a handy place to park toiletries or relax as the water rains down—and it means you'll never again have to shave your legs while balancing flamingo-like on one leg.

Try Angles

The relaxing and therapeutic benefits of steam showers are unbeatable, but they're not always the best choice in a shower stall with a flat ceiling. Condensation collects overhead and drips down (annoying!), so consider either a sloped ceiling or installing the steam shower in a niche with an arched ceiling.

ROYAL FLUSH

Comfort-height toilets, which at 17 to 19 inches high are a few inches taller than standard toilets, are all the rage, but you may want to test-drive one first. The ergonomics of these lofty commodes—the seat is at the same level as a chair—have boosted their popularity among tall people and seniors, but the added height might not be right for petite folks or households with young kids.

YOU'RE GETTING WARMER

Keep tootsies happy during frigid winter months with radiant floor heat: electric wires or tubes of hot water that warm up chilly bathroom flooring so the whole space feels toasty. Thinner, more porous tiles conduct the heat best, but radiant systems can also be laid beneath stone or marble—including in the shower stall. >>

WATERING HOLES

Trending now: chic shower drains, like those in boutique hotels. The most-wanted styles include linear—a long, lean rectangle, often flush with the wall, with a metal or glass grate—and “invisible”—a drainage tray set into the floor and covered by the same tile as the rest of the shower, making it almost undetectable.

PLAY IT COOL

When the kitchen is a trek, a mini refrigerator doesn't feel overly indulgent. It can store not just medications, but also lotions and cosmetics that benefit from cool temps. To wit: Eye creams are more effective from the fridge because the cold constricts blood vessels and decreases puffiness.

Buy or Bye-Bye? Rainfall Showerheads

These oversize nozzles drench your entire body like a steamy tropical rainstorm, but they have designers and homeowners divided.

- You'll have to step out of the spray to lather up. Trying to keep your hair dry? It's awkward, if not impossible.
- The gently falling droplets won't provide enough water pressure for some, and the flow is not adjustable.
- Styles mounted flush to the ceiling often require new pipes overhead, which ups plumbing costs.

VERDICT Luxe and tranquil, but for everyday showers, they're best partnered with a hand sprayer or wall-mounted head for maximum flexibility.

Buy or Bye-Bye? Soaking Tubs

Deciding whether to upgrade to a bigger tub? Consider this:

- Nothing's more restorative than a long, leisurely soak. But how often do you have time for a long, leisurely soak?
- A freestanding bathtub doubles as a sculptural focal point—*ahh!*
- If you have resale value in mind, a good tub helps, since everyone claims to need one. Have a tub in a bathroom other than the master? You're probably covered.
- Mega-size tubs use boatloads of H₂O—100 gallons or more isn't uncommon—so you might need a larger or second water heater.

VERDICT Great if your square footage and budget allows, but be realistic about how often you'll use it.



For a California bath, Reath Design teamed a Calacatta marble sink with an industrial-style shower stall.

THE FASTEST FIXES

Not every bathroom improvement requires drywall dust and disruption. These speedy upgrades can be done in a weekend, a day, or even an afternoon.

BETTER SHOWER PRESSURE

Increasing a shower's water pressure by swapping in an H₂O-amplifying showerhead is a low-effort, high-return project. The nozzles, which create larger droplets, concentrate water flow, and aerate the spray, typically just screw on. A retrofit system, which consists of a showerhead and handheld sprayer attached to a vertical length of visible pipe, is a more complicated install, but not by much.

Since you don't need to access any of the plumbing behind the walls, the project mostly involves drilling into the shower tile and positioning the pipe in place.

A WARM TOILET SEAT

Tricked-out toilets with features like warm-water sprayers, air dryers, seat heaters, deodorizers, and remote controls put ordinary bidets to shame, and they are far easier to set up. The secret: Instead of replacing the entire toilet, you simply swap out the existing seat. Most models require only a quick connection to the commode's current water valve and plugging into an electrical outlet—and then you're done!

TO HELP YOU OUT

Stepping in and out of a soaking tub the size of a plunge pool can be tricky, especially for less-nimble family members (or after a harrowing Spin class). A grab bar minimizes the risk of slips and falls. There are a wide range of styles available, and mounting is straightforward once you locate a wall stud.

STYLISH FIXTURES

Give a lackluster vanity a boost by swapping out the faucet and knobs. Block out a few hours to complete the switch—the project isn't complex, but it's multistep. When you shop, bring a picture and measurements of your current configuration to make sure the new style will be compatible. >>

A boutique-hotel move by designer Lee Ann Thornton: upholstering a wing chair in terry cloth for this mirror-walled bath.



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□ MASSAGING TUB

The hydro equivalent of a full-body rubdown, Kohler's BubbleMassage tub blows heated, high-pressure air from strategically positioned jets. Adjust the air's intensity and location for an all-over massage or to just target achy areas. Jaw-dropping bonus: You can add soaps, oils, or bath salts without fear—unlike with water-jetted tubs, they won't clog or contaminate the equipment. kohler.com

□ DO-IT-ALL SHOWER

Grohe's F-Digital Deluxe shower system Zen-ifies your get-clean routine: The humidity from the steam function soothes skin and sinuses; chromotherapy LED panels help relax you or perk you up; and music streams in via wireless or touch-screen devices. Since it's all customizable and preprogrammed, you can repeat your ideal shower again and again. grohe.com

□ HIDDEN TV

With Seura's vanishing TV mirror, no one has to know you binge-watch your favorite show in the bathroom. Hiding behind a vanity mirror is an LCD television; switch it on

and your guilty-pleasure program—or any channel in your cable package—appears in a portion of the mirror. Not ashamed of your habit? Seura also makes waterproof models for mounting in or on the wall. seura.com

□ HARDWIRED DRAWER

Here's an attractive solution for a bathroom overrun with appliances like hair dryers, curling irons, and electric razors: Robern offers high-tech vanities with docking drawers. Outfitted with three 110-volt electrical outlets, each drawer conceals grooming gadgets while keeping their power sources out of sight. robern.com

THANKS TO OUR DESIGN ADVISERS: Kate Bailey, Ferguson Bath, Kitchen & Lighting Gallery; Kiley Baun and Betsy Helm, Shophouse Design; Sarah Blank; Ohara Davies-Gaetano; Annette English; Christopher Peacock; Barbara Sallick; Patrick Sutton; Jennifer Wagner, Home Depot